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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on issues of providing access to higher education for the Latino community, especially in the state of Illinois. In Illinois, as in other states, Hispanic representation in higher education continues to lag, and Latinos are less likely than other minorities to attend or graduate from college. Northeastern Illinois University addressed this issue, as well as its commitment towards community development, by creating a graduate program with the aim of responding to leadership needs and administrative goals of Chicago's Latino teachers. While Latino graduate enrollment has increased slightly, Hispanics are still underrepresented among students who complete education at the graduate level. Subsequently, the university created an outreach program to serve the Latino community which surrounds the university campus. This program, now the Educational Resource Center, continues to grow and is attracting and recruiting neighborhood youth and non-traditional students for admission to classes at this site. Since academic year 1997-98 the Center has focused on a graduate education program for Latino teachers. (JM)

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From Historical Perspective to Future Projections: Providing Access to Higher Education for the Latino Community

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Close scrutiny of national population trends, yields a fact, which cannot be ignored: that the Hispanic population will be the largest minority group in the United States by the year 2020. In Illinois, the number of Latino inhabitants clearly reflects this national population trend. The city of Chicago remains one of the largest U.S. locations in which Latinos are heavily concentrated. The following shows some recent statistics published in September of this year by the Census Bureau. The growing Hispanic share of central-city populations is slowly producing changes in job structures, job opportunities, government services, private practices, educational endeavors, economic developments, health policies, and so on. Furthermore, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1995, the Hispanic share of the labor force has progressively increased and its projected growth indicates that by the year 2001, individuals of Latino origin will be the second largest minority group in upper, middle, and lower job posts in the United States. Accordingly, Hispanic groups are responding positively to socially adverse forces that would rather overlook these facts. However, and unfortunately, education seems to continue lagging behind in the face of this progressive stride. Currently, Latinos are less likely than other minorities to attend or graduate from college. In Illinois,

recent data shows that only 10.5% of Hispanics have completed a college education. However, at the primary and secondary levels, the Chicago Public Schools show that the Spanish-speaking group is the largest one in the city (61,416) and that there is an increase of Hispanic youngsters who are completing their secondary education. But, paradoxically, colleges and universities are still displaying low enrollment of Hispanic students.

What seems to be more dramatically affected is graduate education. The Hispanic groups are underrepresented in most majors across colleges and universities in the state of Illinois. Although many efforts at the higher education level have delineated diverse plans to help attract Hispanic graduate students, the recruitment processes are failing to capture their interests. Minority recruitment and retention programs have always posed a dilemma for higher learning institutions. The degree of aggressiveness and consistency of these programs vary. Now, the question is what works and what doesn't? Some common ground in recruitment and retention of Hispanic students calls for sensitivity to individual students and their culture, faculty diversity, minority role modeling, culturally responsive academic programs, and assertive school climate.

Higher education institutions share in and implicitly recognize the value of diversity. They reinforce the idea that not only do individuals differ from one another but

that the diversity that they bring is a great source of strength to organizations. Thus, by understanding how different people react to various learning environments and the support provided in those contexts, one could comprehend the evolution of recruitment approaches proposed by colleges and universities inviting culturally diverse individuals to join their ranks.

Hispanics, like all learners, need certain environmental conditions, which increase their self-esteem in order to facilitate their learning. Research studies on Hispanic behaviors as compared with Anglo behaviors have identified multiple patterns of differences. In Table 1, some of these patterns are shown:

Table 1: Patterns of Differences between Latino and Anglo

Hispanic	Anglo
Values spontaneity	Schedule-orientated
Group identity comes first	Individual identity comes first
Nonverbal communication	Verbal communication
Involvement in concurrent activities	One thing at a time
The presence of others is stimulating	The presence of others is a distraction
Degree of friendship defines level of help	Degree of usefulness defines level of friendliness
Need for direction to initiate structure	Shows initiative, time on task
People count the most	Activity accomplishment count first
Solidarity (interpersonal)	Solitary (intrapersonal)
No complaints to authority	Expect validation of complaints from authority

A recruitment and retention program for any institution interested in increasing their yield of Latino students, must by necessity keep these patterns in perspective. That has been the goal of the rationale developed as part of the initiative of the Department of Educational Leadership at Northeastern Illinois University, for a graduate program which addresses the needs of the Chicago Latino teaching community.

Analysis of current statistics like those previously mentioned, and of Chicago's reality, has consequently, moved local higher education institutions to commence new academic developments to fill the apparent gap between Latino students in the schools and the lack of individuals of the same ethnic background with graduate degrees. Moreover, a close scrutiny of statistics from 1997 to 1999, from the Chicago Public Schools, the third largest public school system in the nation, yields the following information: Of 580 schools and their respective principals, there are only 74 latino principals or 12.75%. There are a total of 26,245 teachers in the system, but only 10.1% of these are latino. However, latinos make up 33.4% of the 431,085 students. Obviously, there is great disparity between the number of latino students and school academic or administrative personnel. It is within this national and local context that the Educational Leadership Department at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU), felt compelled to develop a graduate program with the aim of responding to the leadership needs and administrative goals of Chicago's latino teachers.

Since the August 1997 issue of U.S. News & World Report (the best colleges annual issue), and subsequently every year after that, Northeastern Illinois University, has been proclaimed by this national magazine as the number one among Midwestern universities for diversity. This year the July

issues of Black Issues in Higher Education ranked NEIU as among the top universities in the nation for degrees conferred upon minority students. Nevertheless, the University presents the following statistics in its 1997-98 Annual Report and Profile of Admissions and Records. According to this report, Latino graduate enrollment in the fall of 1997, increased from 14% in 1992 to 20% in 1997, almost 1 percent per year. In the same academic period, the percentage of Hispanics seeking an undergraduate degree increased from 17.8% in 1992 to 25% in 1997. This report illustrates that Hispanic graduate students are underrepresented at NEIU. In fact, of the total graduate enrollment in the past three years, only 6.0% to 8.0% are Hispanics. The NEIU Graduate College Statistical Reports (1995, 1996, and 1997) describing the fall semester graduating profile, indicates that of a total of 431 students who completed a graduate degree, 12 Hispanics majored in education, and six in other majors. The statistics for 1998 are not readily available at this time, however, advance information indicates that the numbers have remained relatively constant and consistent with those of the previous years. In examining these years, two aspects emerge significantly. First, the data confirms the Hispanic preference for teaching careers. Secondly, the percentage of Hispanic graduate students in education still represents less than 5% of the total of 252 students who completed

education at the graduate level. Traditionally, education majors have been the prevailing career choices of the students at the university, which, it might be noted, had its beginnings as a Teachers' College. Currently, graduate programs in education contain the highest number of the total graduate students enrolled. Nevertheless, the percentage of Hispanics graduating in education (graduates and undergraduates) does not match the rapidly increasing primary and secondary school Latino student population citywide.

Consequently, the university has devised various responses to deal with this need, making provisions to serve minority groups in a variety of ways. NEIU's awareness of its environment, and its commitment to participating actively in community development translated into the creation of one of its outreach initiatives for the Latino community. In 1975 the initial plans for a special program that would serve the Latino community which surrounds its campus to the south –southwest, were implemented and in 1976 a pioneering cohort of students enrolled in the first four academic courses offered in what has become the Educational Resource Center or Centro de Recursos Educativos. The main purpose of *El Centro*, as it is commonly known, is attracting and recruiting neighborhood youth and non-traditional students for admission and to take classes at this site. For twenty years, *El Centro* and the community leadership

struggled to keep the *El Centro* initiative alive and productive. The main obstacle faced was that of physical facilities. Because El Centro was conceived as an off-campus site, finding appropriate facilities was one of its biggest problems. Overcoming great odds, students and faculty moved from dilapidated basements and second floors to its present location. Twenty years after its inaugural run, El Centro found a quasi permanent site which was then remodeled and provided with state of the art educational environments. The computer lab, for example, boasts 17 computers, upgraded in the summer of 1999. Both faculty and students have access to technology for use in the classrooms as well as the computer lab. El Centro has continued to grow and now offers approximately 30 academic courses a semester to over 400 students. The exact figures for the Fall semester of 1999-00 are the following: we are currently offering 4 graduate and 29 undergraduate courses, and serving a total of 451 students.

Since academic year 1997-98 the academic expansion of the center has focused on the Educational Leadership graduate program courses. For the first time in 20 years, this off-campus site houses a graduate education program for Latino teachers. This program targets Chicago Public School teachers who are either Latinos or work with a primarily Latino student population. The students complete the requirements for the Master's Degree in Educational

Leadership and/or those for the Type 75 Illinois Certification for school administrators. The ELAD program consists of four curriculum sequences of 33 credit hours (11 courses) which include two instructional leadership *practica* and two comprehensive examinations.

In the fall of 1997, at the beginning of the program at El Centro, 18 students enrolled in two courses, Research in Educational Administration and Foundations in Educational Leadership. In the spring of 1998, the number of students enrolled doubled. By the end of 1998, thirty-eight Hispanic graduate students were registered in three courses at the El Centro program. At present, the School Leadership program at El Centro has graduated 14 Hispanic students. The program has grown from 18 to 68 students from diverse ethnic backgrounds who have manifested an interest in serving and working in minority communities.

The Educational Leadership effort ties in with El Centro's goal as described by its new motto: *"Educando a nuestra comunidad para el nuevo milenio"*/ educating our community for the new millennium. Evidently, much remains to be done to enhance the processes of recruitment, selection, admission, registration, course offerings, and scheduling at El Centro. As our experience with the program grows, so do our ambitions and goals for it. The need, which has been identified in the Chicago Public Schools for more Latino educators and administrators, has not diminished.

Therefore, the School Leadership Program gains importance not just as a Northeastern University initiative, but also for the social aspect of our mission. As we face the new millennium with expectations for coping with the population trends and the changes this will bring, this program and El Centro/Northeastern are in a position to affect the changing environment of the Chicago Public Schools and thus the social, cultural and economic growth of the city. With those aims in mind we have delineated some of the strategies we would like to implement:

- Refine a graduate minority recruitment plan for students who aspire to become future educational leaders.
- Encourage a more active general faculty involvement in the diverse activities programmed for El Centro students.
- Bring the university into the schools, through partnerships for Latino teacher training, collaborative research, coaching relationships that help develop new curriculum and instruction.
- Attract external funding to provide support for Latino graduate students majoring in Educational Leadership.
- Implement a strategic plan for cultural sensitivity toward latino graduate students or issues.
- Develop an orientation plan for Latino students at El Centro, which would include comprehensive information about graduate school, the graduate application process, and the rewards of a graduate education.

- Expand of the admission and enrollment processes for new Hispanic graduate students at El Centro.
- Publicize the work of El Centro, sharing with the larger community an inquiry into what the data reveal on Latino issues, needs and desires.
- Market El Centro while reinforcing its vision and mission and how it can be inserted into the new millennium.
- Expand of the technological aspect of the educational process, by incorporating technology in the curriculum.
- Expand the course offerings to other Education courses, like the Bilingual/Bicultural Education courses, and the courses required for certification in this area for both undergraduate and graduate students.

In closing, the future trajectory of El Centro is determined by the dynamics that are influencing higher education on the verge of the new millennium: increasing access to higher education for the Latino community, increasing efforts for support of these students so as to increase their rate of academic success and eventual graduation. Most importantly, we must provide for all our students the opportunity to acquire the skills that will allow them to pursue graduate studies and better jobs. In this day and age, the implication of advanced technology cannot be divorced from this goal. Therefore, efforts must be directed towards developing plans that involve technology

to be included in the curriculum and giving all our students the opportunity to develop in this area. With that aim, the organizational structure of El Centro is adapting to new developments in order to make technological resources more accessible to Latinos. El Centro plans a systematic expansion in which Latin American universities would be reached through distance learning programs, teleconference interactions, web-based courses, and individualized technical interaction. The ultimate goal of these efforts is; of course, to improve and enhance Latino participation in the educational process which will empower our community with the means for continued social, cultural and economic growth. One very important--indeed critical--means of reaching this goal is to broaden the scope of El Centro by offering an added variety of technological perspectives and experiences.